



Each and Every Child

An e-newsletter by the Iowa Department of Education

Summer: Romping, reveling and...*reading*

Pilot program works to prevent 'summer slide' among students on IEPs

An average student can backslide a full month on reading skills during the summer break. It may be even worse for some students on Individualized Education Programs.

That's not acceptable for Shaun Nimke. Her 7-year-old son Alex has come too far to lose a minute of his educational progress. That's why Nimke was delighted to learn that her son's school was having a 12-week summer literacy program.

Sponsored by Prairie Lakes Area Education Agency, Manson Northwest Webster Elementary School in the north central Iowa town of Barnum will host approximately 16 students with historically challenging backgrounds – those with IEPs or who qualify for Title I – in the summer reading program. The goal? To stem the "summer education slide," the skills lost when school has dismissed for summer break.

The pilot program is being launched in one grade school in each of the five regions in Prairie Lakes AEA. The program is princi-



Photos by Department of Education's Deborah Darge

First grader Alex Nimke will be participating in a summer reading program designed to prevent the summer slide.

pally aimed at first graders and, as space allows, second graders. At each of the schools during the program, there will be a literacy consultant, and a special education consultant or speech language pathologist, depending on the individual school needs. Each school pro-

vides a teacher.

"We've been wanting to support schools in early literacy," said Jill Siefken, a consultant for Prairie Lakes AEA. "Statewide, we know there's a huge emphasis on literacy, and ensuring every child can read at grade level by the

end of third grade. So creating this program just made sense."

Elementary Principal Justin Daggett was eager to kick off the literacy program.

"Those who have

been chosen to participate have the biggest needs in literacy," he said.

"They tend to lose the most in the summer. We want to maintain what they learned this year so that next year we can build upon it."

The program uses various strategies to engage students in reading.

"There will be a good mix of big group, small group and independent reading," Siefken said. "The No. 1 thing is to get books into kids' hands – combining that with a balanced literacy program using teachers and comprehension strategies."

Daggett said creating parental enthusiasm is important to the program.

"We sent out personalized invitations," he said. "It's important to involve the parents so that they become active partners in ensuring our work in the school is continued at home."

There's no question that Nimke is a top-drawer partner.

"We pick books that Alex likes to read, and then we read the

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Principal Justin Daggett



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same one for a week or so, then switch,” she said. “Repetition seems to work well for him. But liking the book – that’s important.”

Results of the summer efforts will be measured in the fall, but Daggett is hopeful (if not downright confident) it will continue.



Shaun Nimke

“This program is building capacity in my teachers for literacy instruction,” he said. “I would like to get more teachers involved in this process. Though we’re

limited to one classroom teacher this year, I want to expand that in the future.”

For Nimke and her son, they take a day-by-day approach on literacy instruction.

“The main thing is that we’ve made a lot of progress through the years, and so we don’t want to lose it,” she said. “The more he reads, the more his confidence builds. A week ago while we were reading, he said he wanted to take the book to school. He said he thought he could read it with another student to help him with the harder words, and I reminded him that he could do it himself.”

And he did.

Nimke said that reading is the foundation of all education. And it’s critical to get students up to snuff early on.



Jill Siefken

“It is so important to read and write, and this is the point you need to catch him,” she said. “Reading is the base of everything, and if you don’t have that, it will make for a very tough life. They are your kids, you should want the best for them, and do anything to make their lives as good as possible.”

As for Alex, he is eager to pursue reading about his favorite topic: fire trucks. It’s not that he aspires to being a firefighter, he says with a sheepish grin.

“I like them because they go fast,” Alex said.

No program? Here’s what you can do

The majority of school districts won’t have summer reading programs in place this year. So what can you do? We asked Michelle Hosp, the director of the Iowa Reading Research Center.

What should the parents be doing to help their child prevent the slide?

Make sure kids have access to books at an appropriate level and that they have opportunities to read. Kids can continue to practice – it will absolutely help prevent that slide.

How do you know what is considered age appropriate?

One really easy tip for parents is to have their kids read a page of the book. If the student cannot read 93 to 97 percent of the words, then it is too hard. If they are missing too many words, it is probably something they should not be reading independently. Kids can test themselves. My little guy counts on his fingers the words he gets wrong. When he has counted up to five, he figures the book is not appropriate for him.

Why is it a problem if the child misses more than five-or-so words per page?

If you struggle with too many words, it affects your comprehension – it messes with your understanding. It also slows



Michelle Hosp

you down as a reader. The purpose of reading is reading for understanding. Not understanding something is discouraging, too – who wants to do that?

What kind of books should be selected for the child to read?

Anything that your child finds interesting. If they want to read comics, let them, because it’s also that part of enjoyment – comic books have some rich vocabulary.

What if the child isn’t interested in reading?

Make it fun, not a chore. Another thing that I’ve done with my son is do a book club. He picks the book and we both read it. Then I ask him, “What did you think? What do you think is going to happen?” You can even include neighbor kids.

Story hits reader close to home

“Brewing up careers” in April’s *Each and Every Child* touched my heart in a special way. I have a 30-year-old son with autism. He lives at Opportunity Living in Lake City. Things like this always bring tears to me, as I know the struggles of those very special people who work so hard to make a life for themselves in our world. Wonderful story! Thank you for sharing this!

I always read the e-newsletter when it comes, but this one in particular had my attention! I was actually having one of those mornings where no matter what went on, I just knew the day was going to be bad. I have a whole new attitude, so thank you for turning my day around!

Ann L. Hicks RN
Greene County school nurse